

Free Size

SINUDOM SILK SCREEN FACTORY, BANG KHUN THIAN,
THAILAND



'Free size' is a site-specific exhibition of four artists organized under the aegis of apexart's 'Franchise', an open call for curatorial proposals aimed at cities with a population of less than 500,000. In the second edition of the 'Franchise' project, curator Logan Bay invited artists to work with a local silk-screen factory in Bang Khun Thian, a scruffy provincial town that functions as a suburb of Bangkok, with the aim of providing a 'glimpse of the environment where ideas are physically forged'. The exhibition takes its name from the fact that clothing in Thailand is often manufactured and sold in a single size – 'free size' – as a cost-saving measure.



Fabric and pattern are dominant in the makeshift exhibition space, a seemingly unfinished concrete building with a corrugated plastic roof. Alvaro Ilizarbe, an artist as well as fashion designer, has installed a wall of black-and-white prints of intertwined snakes in a corner where future windows might be. Jen Stark has

hung a relatively small set of brightly coloured, overlapping shapes that appeared as psychedelic drips, while Juan Angel Chavez created a haphazard three-pronged tunnel structure from cheap wood and black cloth. Finally, the artist P7 painted and installed graffiti art around the space. These works are somewhat innocuous, however, in the context of the semi-derelict ambience of the site.



Granted, a location as far-flung and unfamiliar to most as a factory in Bang Khun Thian is likely to eclipse the art installed it, at least for the well-heeled types that are drawn to events such as this. But, of course, that is the point: Bang Khun Thian recalls an older, less developed version of Bangkok where modernity has yet to hold sway over the vernacular. In this respect, the curator can be credited for producing an exhibition of art works and not pursuing a vogueish relationship between art and industry in terms of the sustainable production of commodities. This is particularly important in view of the current Thai government's enthusiastic support of the so-called creative industry; art, it seems, should not be considered valuable unless it generates money.

As art, Ilizarbe's installation stood out; the repeated linear patterns recalled surface decoration from a variety of ancient cultures, including Mayan, Chinese and Greek. This sense of history, however, was filtered through contemporary pop culture through its use of textiles, which suggested a link to fashion. Chavez's robust sculptural installation insisted on the tactile and symbolic aspects of the materials he used, but to what end remained unclear. Chavez seems interested in physically engaging viewers but, given the extensive precedents for this kind of practice, the question of what type of relationship his installation produces is surely urgent and was regrettably not explicitly addressed here. However this point may be benign. Issues of the industrial versus craft, the disposable and the significant, and the artful and the manufactured provided the backbone of 'free size'. Maybe P7's graffiti art was not so innocuous after all.

Brian Curtin